

# DCFS Weekly Update From the State Office

Friday, October 27, 2000

## From My Perspective

*By Ken Patterson*

Resolving disputes between people through means other than war, dueling, or going to court has entered something of a renaissance, both in the United States and globally. This "alternative dispute resolution" movement has found its way into our work as well. In December of 1997 the Administrative Office of the Courts began its Alternative Dispute Resolution program, and has now developed a Child Welfare mediation option. This week I received some data on the outcomes of Child Welfare mediation in Utah. The data are for the period from January 1, 2000 through August 31, 2000. Each Judicial District or DCFS region has had some Child Welfare mediation activity. I want to share what the results have been. I would also like to hear from you about what some of your experiences with mediation have been. So after you read this, drop me an e-message.

During that eight-month period, judges made 411 referrals for Child Welfare mediation. Of these referrals, 77% were from the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> districts or Northern and Salt Lake area regions. About 80% of the referrals led to one or more mediation sessions, and 66% percent of the mediations led to resolution of all of the issues referred for mediation. An additional 14% led to resolution of part of the issues referred, 2% reported progress without resolution, and 18% reported no progress. So in slightly over 80% of the referred cases, mediation proved productive.

When mediation first emerged in Child Welfare there was speculation about where in the process it might prove most effective. While the majority of the mediations are around adjudication issues or case plan requirements, surprisingly about 5% are regarding termination of parental rights. Mediation is proving effective even in those cases, with a 53% resolution rate.

Many seem encouraged by mediation as another effective tool for creating safety, permanence, and well-being for children. It is certainly a different approach than "family unity" meetings but it does have some of the same elements. One prominent Juvenile Court judge in a large California county actually does not accept cases for adjudication until the parties can demonstrate why a family conference and mediation have both failed to create an agreeable plan.

Again, I would love to hear what some of your experiences have been.

## Current Practice Model Training is Not Basic—It's Fundamental!

*By Richard Anderson*

As I write this article, I am flying in the state's smallest plane—a four-seater Cessna. The pilot and I are the only occupants. We will be landing in Price to pick up Bev Hart, Eastern Region Director, and Codi White, Eastern Region MSS, on our way to Navaho Mountain. We are attending the dedication of a new social services office there.

It is cloudy today (it may storm), the pilot tells me we will see how far we can get as we may have to turn back between Provo and Price if the weather does not hold. We are bouncing around quite a bit. If you could see my handwriting, you would know how exciting this flight is getting. The pilot keeps checking all the instruments every few seconds. We can't converse as he has headphones on and is in constant contact with the ground (actually, you may read this after the crash—my last memoir!). The pilot is now shooting for the openings in the clouds. We just made it over the biggest mountain range, and I still have my early morning breakfast.

We are now above the clouds, and the sun is shining. We are not yet at our destination. More clouds and wind are up ahead, but, because I know there are breaks in the clouds and I trust the experience and skills of the pilot, I sit here and continue with my work.

Now, why do I write about this experience? Actually, I have referred to similar experiences in meetings some months ago. There is an analogy to these flights that I have made in those meetings that I would like to share more broadly.

No matter how skilled the pilots are, they always check the fundamentals. In our work we must be alert and ever focused on the fundamentals (skilled communication consisting of fine-tuned, carefully worded messages) and listen with our antennas up and radar on. Like the pilot, we cannot fly alone; we have to stay in touch with the ground by being emotionally in control and by practicing proven skills, keeping in touch with supervisors, clinical consultants, partners, and administrators. We have to provide an atmosphere where the attention can be focused on the important issues that a child or family can deal with at that moment. We need to be astute to those situations, sometimes only seconds, where a window of opportunity shows, as we see a more honest exchange occurring and the opportunity for positive change. A reframe, a solution-focused response, a strength-based sentence, offered at the right time, can be the beginning of life changing responses from a child or parent.

In the midst of the clouds and storms of fear, resistance, confusion, and anger, a clearing opens for honest communication. These seemingly small experiences (some of the most beneficial ones for children and families) are also the payoffs for all of us who work with these special situations. This is a part of how positive changes occur in families and why we stay.

## Standards for Out-of-Home Care Case Creation

*By Caren J. Frost*

In the past two months, there has been quite a bit of discussion surrounding when a case starts for out-of-home care (SCF). DCFS State Office Administration and SAFE had a discussion about two weeks ago to better define this so that data for all areas will be the same. An SCF case must be opened after the 72-hour hearing or within four calendar days after DCFS receives custody of a child. Thus if DCFS is given custody of a child at the 72-hour hearing, you have four calendar days to open the cases as an SCF case. This action typically would all occur within seven days of a removal of a child. It would also allow for smoother transitions between CPS and out-

of-home care on a case, and should provide needed case information for required health care actions.

In addition, this definition means that on a CPS case where DCFS has custody an out-of-home care worker and a CPS worker will have responsibility for the case at the same time. The point is a coordination of effort on a case so that children and families are aware that they are being paid attention to no matter where they are in their involvement with DCFS. Another benefit is that the healthcare team will be alerted to a new case and complete their work in a timely manner.

Bob Lewis was able to obtain some data from SAFE that showed the average number of days that it took offices to create a new SCF case in SAFE after removal of a child. From April 1 to September 13, 2000, we were able to identify six "hero" offices that opened cases in a short timeframe: Moab (2.3 days), Vernal (2.8 days), Layton (4.9 days), Ogden (4.7 days), Beaver (2.4 days), and Cedar City (2.5 days). In addition, Eastern and Northern Regions took 5.5 and 5.1 days, respectively, on average to open these new SCF care cases. Good work!!

For your information, a preliminary action needs to occur in the CPS case in order to meet these timeframes for creating an SCF case. Before creating the SCF case, all of the entries about the removal of the child should be made in the CPS case. The steps to do this are:

- Enter the date DCFS or DHS took custody;
- Enter removal information through the "removal wizard;"
- Initiate a placement record and set up a purchase service authorization for the provider if this is a paid placement;
- Enter the CPS23 information about the child's health, education, and psychosocial background.

After these entries have been made, create the SCF case by using the still open CPS case as the prior case on which the SCF case is based. The CPS case should remain open for the CPS worker to finish his/her work on the investigation.

## **To Make Your Life Easier...Using SAFE Optimally**

*By Robert Lewis*

For those of you still using some kind of change form to tell your eligibility tech that you have changed a placement or closed an SCF case, here is good news! You can throw away those forms (or, better yet, recycle the paper). SAFE now automatically notifies eligibility techs of these changes! This should help reliability of information and save on time and paper.

## Office Listings in GroupWise

*By Carol Miller*

Since we began sending the Weekly Updates, we have encountered numerous problems with ensuring that all DCFS employees receive them. Thanks to **Brooklynn Gray**, the DCFS State Office receptionist, we now have an answer to why this is occurring.

Brooklynn contacted the Office of Technology (OT) with a list of employees and offices that were not receiving the updates as of October 20, 2000. OT upgraded the "HS\_ALLDFS" group in GroupWise, but emphasized how important it is that each office let them know of employee changes as soon as they occur so they can keep the groupings current.

Hopefully, the problems are being resolved and all DCFS employees will receive the Weekly Updates from this point forward. However, if you or anyone you know does not receive an update, please have someone in your office contact OT to make sure they are included in the correct office listing. Also, send me an e-mail and I'll gladly forward any issue to you. Thank you for your help in ironing out this problem! Hope you enjoy these updates!

## Policy/Protocol Differences

*By Craig Monson*

Yes, there are a few differences between the case process review protocol and DCFS policy. Here's what happened.

In the spring of 1999, the court monitor and DCFS management met with the Office of Compliance (now the Office of Services Review) to review the questions and guidelines for the case process review. At that time, the court monitor and DCFS management determined to change the time requirement for Home-Based services to 30 days for all Home-Based cases rather than 15 days for PFP and 45 days for PSS/PSC. Further, they determined to add a question on whether family strengths were considered in developing the service plan.

These changes have been given to the state policy specialist for inclusion into policy. It is anticipated that these changes will be included when the new policy is finalized.